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General Assembly

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New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of the late Paramount Leader of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Mr. Deng Xiaoping

Tribute to the memory of the late President of the Republic of Guyana, His Excellency Mr. Cheddi Jagan

The President: Before we begin our consideration of the items on the agenda for this morning, I should first like to invite the General Assembly to pay tribute to the memory of the late Paramount Leader of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Mr. Deng Xiaoping, whose passing on 19 February 1997 is a loss not only to China but to the international community as well.

With his vision of reform and pragmatism, Mr. Deng will be remembered as an astute leader who stayed China's course towards international peace and security during a time of global transition. He will also be remembered for his unparalleled contributions as the chief architect of modernization, liberalization and economic prosperity in China.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the Permanent Representative of China to convey our heartfelt condolences and profound sympathy to the Government and the people of China and to the bereaved family.

The Assembly will also pay tribute to the memory of the late President of the Republic of Guyana, His Excellency Mr. Cheddi Jagan.

A favourite son of Guyana and an esteemed statesman, Mr. Jagan distinguished himself as a tireless champion of democracy at home and as a staunch supporter of the ideals and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I should like to convey our heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of Guyana and to the bereaved family.

I now invite representatives to stand and to observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memories of the late Paramount Leader of the People's Republic of China and of the late President of the Republic of Guyana.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

The President: I call on the representative of Egypt, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): In behalf of the Group of African States here in New York, I wish to express the Group's sincere condolences to the people and Government of the People's Republic of China upon the death of their leader Mr. Deng Xiaoping.

With his passing, China has lost an important living symbol and leader who planned the emergence of China as a Power on the international scene. The world has lost an epoch-making international figure. Mr. Deng Xiaoping

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was indeed worthy of the respect and admiration of the international community for his key role in promoting China's resurgence in every field.

China has stood by the African States and is linked to us by bonds of true friendship and productive economic cooperation. I am convinced that China, given its relations with and particular interest in Africa, will pursue this policy of cooperation under its new leadership, to the benefit of both populations.

Mr. Deng Xiaoping was active in his country's politics for the past 50 years. At its helm for the past 18 years, he participated in the planning and implementation of China's policies. He has left a clear and indelible stamp on the political, economic and social life of China that will endure through the ages. China and the entire world will recall with admiration his wise guidance and service.

On behalf of the African Group, I wish to convey our sincere condolences to the delegation of China.

In my capacity as Chairman of the African Group, I also wish to extend our sincere condolences to the people, Government and delegation of the Republic of Guyana on the death of Mr. Cheddi Jagan. He served his country and people throughout his life and earned respect nationally and internationally.

On behalf of the African States, I also wish to convey our deep condolences to the Government and people of Jamaica on the occasion of the death of their former Prime Minister, Mr. Michael Manley, who led his country and enjoyed national and international standing.

The President: I call on the representative of Oman, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. Al-Khussaiby (Oman): On behalf of the Group of Asian States, I have the distinct honour and privilege to join the members of this Assembly in paying special tributes to the memory of the late leader of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Mr. Deng Xiaoping, and to the memory of the late President of the Republic of Guyana, His Excellency Mr. Cheddi Jagan.

I am indeed grateful to be accorded this solemn opportunity to convey collective sentiments of heartfelt condolence from the States members of the Asian Group to the bereaved families of His Excellency Mr. Deng Xiaoping and His Excellency Mr. Cheddi Jagan in their grief and to all the people of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Guyana on their great loss.

We recognize that the passing away of His Excellency Mr. Deng Xiaoping is an immeasurable loss to the People's Republic of China and a tremendous source of grief to the Chinese people. To the international community, he was well known as the Paramount Leader who made historic contributions that have a vital bearing on the future and fate of his people and his country.

Guided by his theories, China's economy has made unprecedented achievements over the past years. His people's living standards have greatly improved and his country's outlook has undergone profound changes, winning wholehearted support from his people. Mr. Deng paid close attention to reforms, opening a modernization drive with a high sense of historic responsibility.

To people of the world from all walks of life, His Excellency Mr. Deng was regarded as the founder of the new China and the bearer of the key that opened the doors of the great walls of China to the entire world. His unprecedented move laid down an epochal milestone in the annals of history and received worldwide accolades and acknowledgment.

We are equally anguished and feel a great sense of loss over the demise of His Excellency Mr. Cheddi Jagan, the late President of the Republic of Guyana, who led the Government since his second accession to office in 1992 after the first free and fair elections in post-independent Guyana.

He was well known to the friendly people of Guyana as a man of the people, which in itself says a lot about him. President Jagan has bequeathed to his nation a legacy of commitment to the upliftment of the working people, the poor and the disadvantaged. In 50 years of public life, he displayed confidence, courage and commitment in his lifelong crusade against poverty.

Mr. Jagan's contribution to the struggle against colonialism and for independence transcended Guyana's borders and has been a staple feature of the Guyanese and Caribbean political process for the past five decades. With Guyana as an active member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), he became its Chairman during the last years of his life. At the recent CARICOM conference of Heads of Government in Antigua and Barbuda, it was noted that Mr. Jagan's contribution to global economic issues and his commitment to the

region's development were deeply appreciated by all of his colleagues within CARICOM. Furthermore, his most recent mission was the promotion of a new global human order.

We join the rest of Guyana and people everywhere in mourning the passing away of Guyana's greatest patriot and statesman.

In remembering these two great leaders of our times, the Group of Asian States invites everyone to join together and encourage the people of the People's Republic of China and of the Republic of Guyana to turn their grief into strength, carry forward their leaders' visions and express their mourning through concrete actions towards the achievement of democracy, peace and prosperity. May Almighty God rest their souls in eternal peace.

The President: I call on the representative of the Republic of Moldova, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Ciobanu (Republic of Moldova): On behalf of the Eastern European States, I wish to express our profound sorrow on the death of the senior statesman of China, Mr. Deng Xiaoping.

Over the past two decades, Mr. Deng Xiaoping was an extraordinary figure on the world stage, a great leader and an illustrious son of the Chinese people. He was the driving force behind China's unprecedented modernization and dramatic economic development. He made a monumental contribution to China's well-being and placed it in the ranks of the major countries of the world.

Mr. Deng Xiaoping's life spanned a century of turmoil, tribulation and remarkable change in China. He spurred China's historic economic reform programme, which greatly improved living standards in China and modernized much of the nation.

But not only China benefited from his leadership; the world at large gained from his effort to emphasize peace and development.

China today plays an important role in world affairs, in no small part because of Mr. Deng Xiaoping's determination to open his country to the world and his fight for peaceful and principled relations between States. He will always be remembered by the international community as a paramount personality who stamped his indelible mark on the twentieth century.

I wish to convey, on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, our sincere condolences to the bereaved family and to the Government and the people of China for this tragic loss.

Again on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, I wish to join previous speakers in expressing our deep sadness over the passing of Mr. Cheddi Jagan, President of the Republic of Guyana.

President Jagan was a man of high stature, widely known for his frankness, dedication, determination and integrity, an exemplary figure for the people of the Republic of Guyana and a distinguished citizen of the world.

He left his nation a valuable legacy of commitment to the service of the common people and to tireless efforts in the fight for freedom, as well as in the fight for prosperity for his own compatriots and all the world's poor. He was a brave fighter against any form of domination and exploitation at the international level.

We inherit the late President Jagan's immense intellectual contribution on global economic issues. His vision went beyond the borders of his country, of the Caribbean region and of the southern hemisphere. Indeed, his pursuit of a new global human order won him our respect and admiration.

We are deeply saddened to bid farewell to President Cheddi Jagan. The memory of his work and ideas in the service of his people and of the international community will stay with us.

I wish to convey to his bereaved family and friends and to the people of Guyana our heartfelt condolences for a loss we all regret.

The President: I call on the representative of Paraguay, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Díaz-Pereira (Paraguay) (*interpretation from Spanish*): In this commemorative ceremony, we wish to remember with deepest respect two illustrious public servants who brought honour to their countries: His Excellency Mr. Deng Xiaoping, a very important leader of the People's Republic of China, and His Excellency Mr. Cheddi Jagan, President of the Republic of Guyana.

These two statesmen came from countries with pronounced differences in terms of population and size. However, their lives and their work are perfectly parallel to each other, as each fruitfully devoted a large part of his life to the task of governing.

The legacy of these two men has had a considerable effect on the course of modern history in their respective countries. They belonged to a generation that experienced great conflicts and then became an important factor for change in the contemporary world.

Transcending borders, the work of these men has been incorporated into the grand project in which we are all engaged: making this planet a more and more secure place for humankind. The fruits of their efforts are already in evidence, making it possible for us to look ahead with hope and optimism to a new century of peace and development for the entire human race.

I have the honour, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, which my country is chairing for the month of March, to pay tribute to the memory of Mr. Deng Xiaoping and Mr. Cheddi B. Jagan for the great importance of their contributions.

Finally, our Group wishes to take this opportunity also to remember an illustrious son of Jamaica who recently passed away, The Honourable Michael Manley, former Prime Minister of that country.

The President: I call on the representative of Finland, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Breitenstein (Finland): It is with profound sadness that, on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States, I pay tribute to the memory of two outstanding leaders: the Paramount Leader of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Mr. Deng Xiaoping, and His Excellency Mr. Cheddi Jagan, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

Our delegations deeply regret the death of Mr. Deng Xiaoping. He will be remembered as an exceptional political leader and statesman.

The last 20 years in China have been the era of Mr. Deng Xiaoping. Mr. Deng contributed greatly to China's development. He steered China firmly on the course of economic reform. During the reform period of nearly 20 years, China's economy increased more than tenfold, and the living standard of both rural and urban citizens improved significantly.

Mr. Deng's role was instrumental in the opening of China to the outside world. Similarly, he was the main architect of the "one country, two systems" policy. Characteristic of his modesty and critical mind is the remark he once made when speaking of his own achievements:

> "I would be quite content if the ratio between my achievements and mistakes were evaluated to be 50-50."

History will undoubtedly pass fair judgement on him. But for us here today it is already clear that the legacy of Deng Xiaoping in China is a lasting one.

Mr. Cheddi Jagan's career as a political leader lasted half a century. He led his country to independence and served as President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana from October 1992 until his untimely demise. Mr. Jagan was also an active trade union leader. In addition, he was an avid writer, as is evidenced by his many books and papers on Guyana's path as a nation as well as on the role of the Caribbean as a whole in the international arena. Mr. Jagan's accomplishments are lasting and will be remembered.

I would like to conclude by expressing my Group's sincere condolences to the family of Mr. Deng Xiaoping and to the people of the People's Republic of China, as well as to the family of Mr. Cheddi Jagan and the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. I would also like to take this opportunity to express on behalf of my Group our sincere condolences to the delegation of Jamaica and to the people of Jamaica on the untimely death of their former Prime Minister, Mr. Michael Manley.

The President: I call on the representative of the United States of America.

Mr. Richardson (United States of America): As the representative of the host country, I wish to express my Government's deepest sympathy on the passing of three distinguished world leaders — President Cheddi Jagan of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, Mr. Deng Xiaoping of the People's Republic of China and Mr. Michael Manley, former Prime Minister of Jamaica — and pay tribute to them for their remarkable lives.

President Cheddi Jagan played a dominant role in Guyana's life and politics for more than 45 years. He was a founder of the People's Progressive Party, which led Guyana's struggle for independence. He was truly an international personality and leader who never forgot his people or his obligations to care for the poor of his own country and for the poor of other countries. He was a humanist who sought a variety of political solutions to the problems of economic distribution.

To the very end, President Jagan was a man of strong ideals and principles with a creative vision for a better world and a better life for his people and his beloved Guyana. The people of Guyana have lost a respected President, and the world has lost a champion of the poor. As President Clinton noted last week, President Jagan was a man whose great dignity, courage and leadership will long be remembered. Guyana has lost a distinguished statesman, and the United States has lost a good friend.

As President Clinton said, Mr. Deng was an extraordinary figure on the world stage. Mr. Deng spurred China's historic economic reform programme and opened his country to the outside world. His historic visit to our country in 1979 laid the foundation for the rapid expansion of relations and cooperation between China and the United States. We offer our condolences to his family and the Chinese people. He will be missed.

Let me also take this opportunity to convey to the representative of Jamaica and the people of Jamaica my deepest sympathy on the death of former Prime Minister Michael Manley. Mr. Manley was a distinguished leader who brought Jamaica through difficult changes towards a better future. Not only did he devote his life to the public service of his nation, but he endeavoured to promote development and prosperity for the rest of the developing world. Mr. Manley's life and career were marked by his deep compassion for the world's less fortunate and his great love for his people and for Jamaica. As we mourn his passing, we take comfort in the legacy of patriotism, dedication and devotion to democracy that Mr. Manley left behind.

The President: I call on the representative of China.

Mr. Qin Huasun (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): Mr. Deng Xiaoping, deeply loved by Chinese people of all ethnic groups, passed away in Beijing on 19 February 1997.

Mr. Deng Xiaoping was an outstanding leader, enjoying the high esteem of the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese People's Liberation Army and Chinese people of all ethnic groups. He was the chief architect of the reform, opening and modernization of China. He was the founder of the theory of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. The passing of Mr. Deng Xiaoping is an immeasurable loss to Chinese people of all ethnic groups.

The great and glorious life of Mr. Deng Xiaoping was closely linked with the liberation, development and revitalization of the Chinese nation. Mr. Deng Xiaoping, at the core of China's second generation of central collective leadership, demonstrated extraordinary courage and resourcefulness at critical moments of China's development. He made major decisions to establish economic development as the central task and reform and opening as fundamental State policy. Since then, China has undergone a great historical process encompassing rural and urban reform, economic restructuring and restructuring in all other fields, invigoration of the domestic economy and opening up to the outside world. In this process, China's national economy has developed rapidly, the nation as a whole has grown ever stronger, the people have gradually become better off and the country's outlook has undergone profound changes. All this has won the hearty support of the people.

Mr. Deng Xiaoping once said that without Mao Zedong, the Chinese people would have had to grope in the dark for a longer period of time. Likewise, we should say today that without Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese people would not be able to live the new life they live today and would not have today's reforms, opening and bright prospects of modernization.

The complete reunification of China is the common aspiration of the entire Chinese nation, and the idea of achieving it peacefully as "one country, two systems" was a great contribution of Mr. Deng Xiaoping. The concept of "one country, two systems" has provided a fundamental guarantee for the gradual achievement of China's reunification.

Observing scientifically the changes in the international situation, Mr. Deng Xiaoping led us in the reshaping of an international strategy adhering to an independent foreign policy of peace, safeguarding world peace, promoting world development and opposing hegemonism and power politics, thus opening up a new situation in China's relations with foreign countries in a

new era, and making historic contributions to developing and strengthening China's friendly relations with all countries in the world on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence. It was in this very forum, in 1974, that he put forward, on behalf of the Chinese Government, the proposal to establish a new international economic order.

Mr. Deng Xiaoping proved himself to be a great son of the Chinese people. He deeply loved his motherland and his people, and was deeply loved and respected by the Chinese people. The central collective leadership, with President Jiang Zemin at its core, will lead the Chinese people in carrying forward the behest of Mr. Deng Xiaoping, advancing the great cause pioneered by him: building China into a prosperous, democratic and civilized socialist country, and developing friendly relations of cooperation with all countries in the world, thus making more, and greater, contributions to peace, development and the progress of mankind.

At today's meeting, the President of the General Assembly, the Chairmen of regional groups and the representative of the host country have expressed their condolences on the passing of Mr. Deng Xiaoping. I wish to express, in the name of the Chinese delegation, my heartfelt thanks to the President of the General Assembly, the Chairmen of regional groups and the representative of the host country. I will convey these condolences and sincere sentiments to the Chinese Government, the Chinese people, and the family of Mr. Deng Xiaoping.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express our condolences on the passing of President Cheddi Jagan of Guyana and of former Prime Minister Michael Manley of Jamaica. I would like to ask the Permanent Representatives of Guyana and of Jamaica respectively to convey to the Governments of Guyana and of Jamaica and to the families of President Jagan and Prime Minister Manley our deepest condolences.

The President: I call now on the representative of Guyana.

Ms. Cornette (Guyana): I should like to thank you, Mr. President, and other members of the General Assembly for the moving tributes paid to the memory of Mr. Cheddi Jagan, late President of the Republic of Guyana, who passed away on 6 March 1997 after a brief illness. It is with a deep sense of humility and gratitude that I accept these tributes on behalf of the Government and the people of Guyana, the bereaved family of Mr. Jagan and Guyana's delegation to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

The passing of Mr. Jagan marks the end of an era in Guyana. Born on 22 March 1918 in humble circumstances, Mr. Jagan gave his life to service to Guyana and reached the highest office in his beloved country. After studying abroad and being trained professionally as a dentist, Mr. Jagan returned home to a call to serve his country in the political arena. This he did with courage, dedication and great distinction. For more than 50 of his 78 years he gave dedicated and selfless service to the Guyanese people. During that time, he remained a key actor in the political struggle in Guyana for democracy, development and social justice, persevering in spite of many obstacles both at home and abroad.

Mr. Jagan was the founder of the modern political movement in Guyana. A Political Affairs Committee formed by him in 1946, in partnership with others, led to the founding in 1950 of the People's Progressive Party, Guyana's first mass-based political party. From that platform, Mr. Jagan spearheaded Guyana's struggle first for universal adult suffrage then for self-government and eventual independence from colonial rule. In 1953, he was elected the first Premier of the then British Guiana but was removed from office a mere 133 days later for holding a political outlook contrary to that of the colonial authorities at the time. Mr. Jagan was, however, to return to win successive elections in 1957 and 1961.

The enthusiasm and tirelessness with which President Jagan pursued his goals were outstanding. His commitment to the upliftment of the Guyanese people remained steadfast. He demonstrated enormous passion for the improvement of the human condition in all parts of the globe. By the same token, he pushed for reforms in social development at home: in housing, health and education. In education, a singular achievement of Premier Jagan's administration was the establishment in 1963 of the University of Guyana, Guyana's sole university. His early activism on behalf of labour did not desert him on assumption of political office. He worked for the enactment of labour laws that would protect workers' rights and improve their working conditions. Even though he did not lead the country into independence in 1966, our attainment of that status was due in large measure to his earlier efforts which awakened the political consciousness of the masses in Guyana.

After 1964, Mr. Jagan spent a long sojourn — some 28 years — in the political opposition in Guyana. Throughout this period Mr. Jagan proved indomitable. He remained steadfast to his ideal of a better life in larger freedom for the Guyanese people and never abandoned his faith in the realization of this dream. He thus led a long and arduous struggle for the restoration of democracy in his homeland. For him the restoration of democracy was Guyana's only hope for survival.

In 1992, the first internationally certified free and fair elections in Guyana in 28 years resulted in Mr. Jagan's return to office as President of the Republic. As President, he dedicated enormous energies towards the eradication of poverty and the strengthening of our fragile democracy. Firmly committed to people-centred development, he kept Guyana on a path of sustained economic growth while addressing urgent social concerns. In fulfilment of his commitment to the World Summit on Social Development, this year 20 per cent of our national budget has been dedicated to the social sector, up from 8 per cent in 1992. Mr. Jagan's passionate concern for people led in his later years to his vision and strong advocacy for a new global human order that would redress the inequities of the present order.

Mr. Jagan has left behind a legacy of struggle, determination and triumph. He demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the upliftment of the working people, the poor and the disadvantaged. His passing is a great loss for our nation and its people. With these words, I wish once again to express my delegation's appreciation for the kind sentiments expressed in tribute to the memory of our late President. I will not fail to convey these sentiments to my authorities and to the bereaved members of Mr. Jagan's family.

Finally, I wish to associate my delegation fully with the sentiments expressed on the memory of Mr. Deng Xiaoping, the late Paramount Leader of the People's Republic of China. On behalf of the Government and people of Guyana, I wish to convey our heartfelt condolences to the Chinese delegation to the United Nations and to the Government and people of the People's Republic of China. Guyana shares in a very poignant way the great loss China has suffered.

Permit me to express to our sister Caribbean Community (CARICOM) State, Jamaica, the condolences of the delegation of Guyana and the Government and people of Guyana on the passing of the late Mr. Michael Manley, former Prime Minister. The passing of Mr. Manley is not only a great loss for Jamaica, but also a loss for our region. His work will greatly influence the continued work within the region, and we ask that these condolences be conveyed to the bereaved family.

The President: I now call on the representative of Jamaica.

Miss Durrant (Jamaica): My delegation wishes to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica, to thank the members of the Assembly for the condolences expressed on the passing of the former Prime Minister of Jamaica, Mr. Michael Manley.

Mr. Manley was a leader and a statesman who committed his life selflessly to serving the people of Jamaica and peoples across the globe. In a relentless search for solutions to the problems that confronted the downtrodden, the oppressed and the unfortunate among us, he sought to advance the goals of peace, justice and prosperity for all mankind.

His passing represents for us a monumental loss, and we wish to take this opportunity to thank again the members of the Assembly for their expression of sympathy in this, our time of grief and national loss, and I will convey these sentiments to the Government and people of Jamaica and to the members of Mr. Manley's bereaved family.

I wish also to take this opportunity to express our sincere condolences to the Government and people of China on the loss of their Paramount Leader, Mr. Deng Xiaoping, and to request the delegation of China to convey our sentiments to the members of the bereaved family and to the Government and people of China.

The passing of President Jagan leaves a void in the Caribbean, and I wish to take this opportunity to express to the delegation of Guyana the sincere condolences of the Government and people of Jamaica and of the delegation here, and we again request the delegation to convey our sincere condolences to the Government and people of Guyana.

Earthquake in the Islamic Republic of Iran

The President: May I, on behalf of all the members of the Assembly, extend our deepest sympathy to the Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the tragic loss of life and extensive material damage that have resulted from the recent earthquake.

May I also express the hope that the international community will show its solidarity and respond promptly and generously to any request for help.

I now call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Kharrazi (Islamic Republic of Iran): May I convey my gratitude for the Assembly's expression of support and sympathy over the loss of nearly 1,000 lives and the injury of several thousand people as a result of the devastating earthquake in northern Iran. The magnitude 5.5 quake hit Ardebil province on Friday, 28 February 1997, and on Sunday, 2 March 1997, another earthquake of magnitude 5.1 hit the same area. As of yesterday, more than 920 aftershocks had been recorded. The harsh winter conditions have added to the existing difficulties in rendering assistance to the people affected by the earthquake.

The people and Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran have mobilized their resources to alleviate the suffering of the approximately 60,000 people who have been affected by the earthquake. According to the latest information I have received, the extent of the damage, besides the loss of human lives, is as follows: 20 villages destroyed; 80 villages, 40 to 90 per cent destroyed; 10,000 houses damaged by more than 40 per cent; 105 schools destroyed; 40 medical or health centres destroyed; 9 communications centres destroyed; 30 villages with water-distribution systems destroyed; and 30,000 livestock dead. Roads and electrical power lines also have been heavily damaged.

A national response was immediately provided by the provincial and national authorities as well as by the Iranian Red Crescent Society. The United Nations assessment team has visited the disaster area and confirmed the efficiency of the relief operation undertaken by the Government and the Iranian Red Crescent Society in an environment of snow and below-zero temperatures.

Finally, I should like to express our appreciation to the United Nations and its specialized agencies as well as to those Governments and non-governmental organizations that have contributed to the ongoing relief operations for the victims of the Ardebil earthquake.

Agenda item 119 *(continued)*

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/51/780/Add.2)

The President: In a letter contained in document A/51/780/Add.2, the Secretary-General informs me that, since the issuance of his communications dated 21 and 30 January 1997, Afghanistan, Belarus, Djibouti, Honduras, Panama, Sierra Leone and Turkmenistan have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

The President: I have also been informed that Yemen has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

The President: This information will be reflected in an addendum to document A/51/780.

Agenda items 33 and 35 *(continued)*

The situation in the Middle East

Question of Palestine

The President: Members are aware that I have received a letter dated 8 March 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar (A/51/822) and a letter dated 10 March 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Colombia (A/51/823), both of which requested an urgent meeting of the Assembly on these two items.

In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988, I now call on the Observer for Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): We come before the Assembly today to draw attention to the grave developments unfolding in the Middle East as a result of Israel's persistence, as the occupying Power, in pursuing its policies and measures to Judaize occupied East Jerusalem and to change its legal status and demographic composition, as well as Israel's continuing colonial settlement campaign in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 and its resumption of the

building of colonial settlements there. All these measures represent a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and relevant United Nations resolutions and are a breach of the agreements concluded within the framework of the Middle East peace process.

We come before the Assembly today following the failure of the Security Council to carry out its duties under the Charter of the United Nations due to the decision of one of the Council's permanent members — the United States of America — to use its veto power on 7 March 1997 with regard to a draft resolution sponsored by France, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom concerning East Jerusalem and the issue of settlements. The draft resolution did, however, receive 14 votes in favour from the members of the Council. It is our hope that the General Assembly will adopt the necessary position, based on international law, justice and concern for the peace process in the Middle East, by calling on Israel to refrain from its illegal policies and measures, including the building of settlements, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem.

We affirm the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with regard to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive resolution of the question in all its aspects is attained. We furthermore affirm that the duties of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security naturally include the Middle East. The existence of the peace process and the agreements between the parties does not diminish this responsibility, but rather reinforces it, so that it includes providing support for and protecting the process, as well as confirming the parties' compliance with their contractual obligations.

Israel's violation of its contractual obligations has caused great damage to the peace process and threatens the possibilities for achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. This is particularly evident because such violations include violations of international humanitarian law and relevant United Nations resolutions. This makes it necessary for the General Assembly and the Security Council to fulfil their duties to preserve the peace process and to uphold international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. This becomes imperative as Israel takes unilateral measures to impose new facts on the ground, thus causing the breakdown of the forthcoming negotiations between the parties and exploiting its power.

To preserve international law, principles of justice and ethical values it is necessary for the international community, represented by the United Nations, to reiterate its firm position with regard to the consequences of such illegal Israeli policies and measures. This includes reaffirming that all legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel aimed at changing the legal status of Jerusalem and its demographic composition are legally null and void; that Israeli settlements are illegal and represent a great obstacle on the road to peace; that the plight of Palestinian refugees must be resolved through their right to return or through compensation; and that the acquisition of territory by acts of war is inadmissible. What has been done illegally will remain illegal, and this will not change with the passage of time or a change in circumstances.

The Government of Israel decided on 26 February 1997 to build a new colonial settlement in the area of Jabal Abu Ghneim in occupied Palestinian territory. This area lies within the territory that Israel annexed and considers a part of the extended municipal boundaries of the city of Jerusalem. This has been done illegally and in blatant violation of international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions. The new Israeli decision provides for the building of 6,500 housing units on an area of 1,850 dunums which were confiscated during 1991 and 1992 and which will bring in about 25,000 new Israeli settlers. This colonial settlement will isolate Arab East Jerusalem from the southern part of the West Bank and isolate Jerusalem as a whole from the city of Bethlehem.

This Israeli measure follows a series of Israeli measures and actions regarding Jerusalem. Earlier, Israel demolished a building belonging to the Burj al-Laqlaq Association inside the walled Old City in an attempt to revive a settlement plan in that holy place. On 23 September 1996 the Israeli authorities also opened a tunnel in the vicinity of Al-Haram al-Sharif, creating further changes in the nature of the city. In that case, Israel refused, as usual, to abide by Security Council resolution 1073 (1996), which in its first paragraph called for the immediate cessation and reversal of all acts aggravating the situation and having negative implications for the Middle East peace process. Furthermore, in the second week of December 1996 the Israeli authorities declared the Government's intentions to implement a plan for the building of a colonial settlement composed of 132 housing units for Jewish settlers in the heart of occupied East Jerusalem, in Ras al-Amud, near Al-Haram al-Sharif.

The Israeli authorities continue their attempts to deprive the Palestinians of Jerusalem of their natural and inherited right to live in their city as their ancestors did. Israel considers them foreigners and has used various

illegal manoeuvres and measures to deprive them of what it calls rights of residence. These include, for example, its attempts to enforce such a measure in connection with all those who live temporarily outside of Jerusalem or have acquired a second citizenship.

Furthermore, Israel has long enforced the isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory and shut the Palestinian people out of the city, despite the fact that it is the economic, cultural and religious centre of the Palestinian people. This constitutes another Israeli attempt to impose a de facto situation with regard to Jerusalem, a blatant violation of the rights of the Palestinian people and a defiance of the will of the international community.

In addition to all this, the Israeli Government has resumed its settlement activities in all the occupied Palestinian territory, including the building of new housing units, the transfer of new settlers, the confiscation of more lands, the building of bypass roads and the further exploitation of our natural resources. All these activities flagrantly violate The Hague Rules of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The Security Council, in 24 resolutions, has reaffirmed the applicability of the Convention to all the territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem. These measures also constitute a violation of several General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on Jerusalem in general and settlements in particular.

Such Israeli measures and practices also violate the agreements already reached between the Palestinian and Israeli sides and the logic of the entire peace process. The two parties concurred in those agreements to postpone negotiations on specific issues, including Jerusalem and the settlements, to the second stage, which by necessity requires the parties to refrain from any unilateral action creating more facts on the ground and dooming the forthcoming negotiations to failure.

Israel's acceptance of the status of Jerusalem as an issue to be negotiated; its agreement to classify Jerusalem as an electoral district among the general Palestinian districts, with seven representatives in the Palestinian Legislative Council; and the commitment made in a letter by its former Foreign Minister to preserve the Palestinian institutions in the city clearly prove that all the Israeli measures currently being taken are illegal even in the light of agreements reached between the Palestinian and Israeli sides.

In any event, Jerusalem is an issue of central importance to the Palestinian people, the Arab world and the Islamic Ummah, since Jerusalem is the first kiblah and the third holiest sanctuary of Islam and is also of great importance to the followers of the three monotheistic religions and to the entire international community. Accordingly, Jerusalem will not accept the imposition of monopoly or sole ownership by any of the parties.

We will not accept the annulment of Palestinian and Arab rights in Holy Jerusalem and we believe that the international community should affirm its rejection of the illegal Israeli positions, which affect the interests of all the other parties. We affirm that there can be no peace in the Middle East without the restoration of our legal rights in Holy Jerusalem.

From the moment the current Israeli Government came to power, there have been great tension and a retreat from all the progress and achievements of the peace process. The Government has adopted broad political guidelines that violate the basic foundations upon which the peace process was established and all the agreements reached between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. These guidelines have been implemented through the practices and measures that I have enumerated regarding the Israeli settlement system in the occupied territory, the situation in Holy Jerusalem and the continued closure and siege of Palestinian territory, all of which represent an actual threat to the peace process and its continuity.

Despite all the hopes raised after the conclusion of the protocol on redeployment from Hebron and the note for the record, which were considered as marking the beginning of a new era, this Government's reversion to the same policies and measures — including its decisions to build the settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim and to close independent Palestinian institutions in occupied East Jerusalem — has served only to dash these hopes.

In addition, Israel's negotiating positions have completely prevented progress in the implementation of the agreements reached, particularly with regard to such long-overdue issues as safe passage, the seaport and the airport. Finally, Israel's announcement of redeployment from 2 per cent of the West Bank, which in fact keeps about 70 per cent of the total area of the West Bank under complete Israeli control, is merely an attempt to pass this measure off as the first of the three steps of the second stage of the redeployment. This latest Israeli

action was taken unilaterally, without negotiations with the Palestinian side, and cannot be considered an honest implementation of the agreement, which provides for the completion of the second stage of redeployment by March 1998, but no later than mid-1998, and would maintain the Israeli forces only at agreed military locations.

The most important matter in all of this should not be the details of Israel's practices and behaviour, which are indeed very complex, but what they represent, which are policies seeming to aim at the retention of a large portion of the occupied territory, including East Jerusalem, and at preventing the Palestinian people from enjoying their inalienable rights. Such designs totally contradict the mutual recognition of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and the text and spirit of the agreements reached, which specify the aim of the process: the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

This is the problem. We should not attempt to hide it and the draft resolution should focus on it. The solution is to guarantee the real and actual compliance of the Israeli Government with the agreements reached and their complete implementation in good faith and in accordance with the agreed timetables. Furthermore, this Government should refrain from taking any measure or action that violates international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions. This is the road to the just, permanent and comprehensive peace in the region towards which we are working and for which the entire international community should strive. Any other course of action will lead to other, less desirable results for which the Israeli side will bear sole and complete responsibility. We have confidence that the General Assembly will play out its natural and positive role in this regard.

Mr. Peleg (Israel): Since the Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991, Israel and its Arab neighbours have been engaged in creating and nurturing peace for our region. Our hope is to end the cycle of hatred, violence and bloodshed which has gripped our region for so long. The only way to do this, as has been proved time and again, is through face-to-face negotiations. The Madrid formula of 1991 has yielded many fruits thus far for the Middle East and all its peoples.

On 13 September 1993 Israel and the Palestinians embarked on our historic reconciliation. One year later Israel signed a Treaty of Peace with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. It is our hope that negotiations with Syria and Lebanon will resume in the near future as well. The steering committee of the multilateral working group is scheduled to meet later this month in Moscow, after which the five multilateral working groups are to meet. We hope for substantial progress in these meetings as well, for the benefit of all our peoples and our future generations.

The signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on 13 September 1993 began a new relationship between our two peoples, based on the understanding that grievances between us can be resolved only through direct negotiations. Time and again this method of direct negotiations has been vindicated and has brought tangible benefits to the whole region. The Declaration of Principles and all the subsequent agreements between Israel and the Palestinians — from the Cairo agreement of 4 May 1994 and the Israel-Palestine Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of 28 September 1995, through the Hebron protocol signed less than two months ago — were all achieved through direct negotiations between the parties themselves, for which there has been no substitute. We had our disagreements, and we faced many difficult moments. But these agreements were reached because both sides remained committed to talking through the issues and negotiating in good faith. Significantly, these agreements have codified appropriate mechanisms to discuss outstanding issues and to settle disagreements and disputes, without the threat of violence and without the interference of outside parties.

In addition to providing for the redeployment of the Israeli Defence Force in the West Bank city of Hebron, the Hebron protocol of 17 January 1997 created timetables for further redeployment in the West Bank and for the imminent resumption of the permanent status negotiations. Last week the Government of Israel approved the plan for the first further redeployment. The decision involves a significant redeployment in the West Bank. In addition, all female Palestinian prisoners were released from Israeli jails and nine committees were formed to discuss all outstanding issues, including the construction of an airport and seaport in Gaza and the issue of safe passage. Further steps were also taken to address the economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including increasing the number of Palestinians allowed to work in Israel to 70,000.

Our sincere hope was and still is that the Hebron protocol and the subsequent actions will increase mutual trust and create an atmosphere conducive to advancing the

peace process. However, despite the progress that has been achieved thus far, the Palestinians have regrettably fallen into a dysfunctional behavioural pattern. Lately, whenever contentious issues have arisen between us, instead of seeking redress of these issues through the agreed mechanisms — i.e., direct negotiations — the Palestinians have run to third parties and bodies not involved in the peace process, with the hope of imposing their positions on Israel.

Israel is committed to providing services to all the residents of Jerusalem. It is important here to distinguish between two separate issues: the issue of Jerusalem and the issue of the settlements. These issues will be discussed separately in the context of the permanent status negotiations, which are scheduled to resume later this month. Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Israel, is a living, breathing city with its own particular growth and development needs for both its Jewish and non-Jewish populations. Israel is committed to the unity and the well-being of Jerusalem, to coexistence and cooperation between Jews, Christians and Muslims and to the development of Jerusalem for the benefit of all of its residents.

I would like here to state unequivocally that the Government of Israel does not regard the United Nations as the appropriate forum for discussing issues of contention between Israel and the Palestinians; not the Security Council, and not the General Assembly. What are the Palestinians seeking from the United Nations: to turn the clock back to the dark days preceding the peace process, to the days of enmity, confrontation and stagnation? Let us all reject these old methods. The multitude of United Nations resolutions relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict failed to advance the peace process even one inch. Direct negotiations, beginning in Madrid and continuing for the better part of this decade, have proved the only way to advance the cause of peace in our region.

Israel, too, has grievances concerning Palestinian violations of our agreements. But we prefer not to misuse this body to air our concerns. We prefer to do so directly with the Palestinians, as agreed by the two sides. The United Nations should not be the forum to ask why the PLO, despite written promises, has failed to complete the process of revoking the provisions of its charter that call for the destruction of the State of Israel. Neither is the United Nations the place to ask why the Palestinians resort to violence when their negotiating demands are not fully met.

Likewise, we have not run to the United Nations when the Palestinian Authority opened offices in Jerusalem in violation of the agreements signed with Israel. Jerusalem is not included inside the area in which Palestinian autonomy authorities are to have powers or responsibilities. And we have not turned to the United Nations whenever Arab buildings in Jerusalem are constructed or renovated without the required permits.

To the Palestinians we say, "Let us agree on a code of conduct for our future negotiations and relations. Let us agree on the following: negotiations will be direct; violence and armed struggle are invalid means; reciprocity is the basis of all our agreements." This code of conduct could serve as a blueprint for the continued dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians.

Israel's message to the international community is this: continue to support the peace process, but do not adopt one-sided positions that aim to prejudge and predetermine the outcome of our negotiations. Israel is committed to the peace process. And we trust that together with our Arab neighbours we will reach the promised land of comprehensive peace and economic prosperity for the entire region.

The President: I call next on the representative of Senegal, who will speak in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*interpretation from French*): It is with real pleasure, Sir, that I see you presiding over this important meeting of the General Assembly, urgently convened at the request of the Group of Arab States for a reason known to us all. It is regrettable that the Security Council did not respond to the decision of the Israeli Government, the occupying Power, to build a new settlement in the Jabal Abu Ghneim area in southern East Jerusalem, even though the members of the Council and all other delegations that participated in the debate on 5 and 6 March 1997 unanimously denounced and rejected that decision. Various other measures Israel has adopted to strengthen its grip on East Jerusalem in advance of the negotiations were also referred to during the Council debate.

On 7 March the Security Council failed to adopt a draft resolution submitted by France, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which would have called upon the Israeli authorities to refrain from all actions or measures,

including settlement activities, which alter the facts on the ground, pre-empting the final status negotiations, and have negative implications for the Middle East peace process.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People regrets that this draft resolution was not adopted owing to the negative vote of a member of the Security Council. In the view of the Committee, a resolution reaffirming the Security Council's earlier decisions would have been timely and would indeed have helped progress in the peace process. Nonetheless, we note with satisfaction that the other members of the Security Council voted in favour of the draft resolution, thus sending a clear political message to the Israeli authorities: that the whole international community considers their decision to be a serious violation of United Nations resolutions and of international law, and that this Israeli decision could well compromise the Middle East peace process and the integrity of the agreements reached between the Israeli Government and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

While it is true that the peace process has moved forward somewhat, as shown in particular by the recent agreement on redeployment of the Israeli army in Hebron — a redeployment which the international community viewed as a major event that made it possible for the peace process to be resumed — the illegal decision of the Israeli Government is a major source of concern because of the harsh blow it could deal the Middle East peace process. Combined with other measures on East Jerusalem and the obstacles and delays experienced throughout the peace process, this decision casts serious doubt on the commitment and political will of the occupying Power to implement the provisions of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements and on its will to establish just peace with the Palestinians on the basis of the formula established at Madrid and Oslo.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is deeply concerned at this situation, which could have a negative impact on the final status negotiations, which are of deep concern not only to the peoples of the region but to the entire international community.

The status of Jerusalem/Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the future of the occupied Palestinian territories fall within the purview of international law and the will of the international community. The status of that international city has been the subject of numerous statements by the international community and by the Security Council. The annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967 and the Israeli law naming Jerusalem as the State capital were rejected by the Security Council, which declared those measures null and void.

Many United Nations resolutions, notably Security Council resolutions 446 (1979), 452 (1979) and 465 (1980), have condemned Israel's policy of building settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Moreover, that policy of the occupying Power is a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention; all the measures taken by Israel in this sphere are without legal validity and should be rescinded.

Some argue that the United Nations should not address these matters, and that they should be dealt with in the permanent status negotiations; this argument is unacceptable to us. First of all, the fact that the parties decided to negotiate within a given framework in no way negates the respect that must be accorded the principles of international law, and does not end the role of the United Nations and the international community in safeguarding international law.

Furthermore, the Committee considers that the goal of the agreed peace process is to bring about the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which are based on the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. The international community in general and the United Nations in particular must be closely involved in the various stages of the peace process and must continue to help the process along and keep it on track.

We must not forget that the General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that the United Nations will bear a central ongoing responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until all aspects of that question are resolved in accordance with international law.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is convinced that the peace process will make progress only if both parties are genuinely prepared to implement all measures and provisions in the agreements they so courageously and painstakingly concluded. At this critical stage, it is essential for the success of the peace process for the parties to spare no effort to do away with such factors as the climate of mistrust and suspicion.

The international community, and the leaders who were bold enough to make a historic breakthrough for peace, must not be disappointed. It is essential that the peace process not be compromised by short-sighted policies. Here, as elsewhere, it is crucial that the parties consider the issue from a political and historical perspective.

The Committee believes that now more than ever, genuine political will is needed to resume the peace process and prevent the situation from deteriorating once again, which could undermine the efforts made by all those peace-loving peoples throughout the world who have worked so hard for the dawning of an era of peace, understanding and stability in the Middle East.

It is in the interest of all the peoples in the region for the Israeli leaders to recognize, as soon as possible, that this peace can be achieved only if it is a just one. This quest for peace requires compromise and the establishment of a genuine partnership of trust.

In the final analysis, the repeated denial of the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people cannot easily be reconciled with the efforts to continue and consolidate the peace process.

The convening of this meeting by the members of the General Assembly sends a clear signal to international public opinion regarding the extent to which the decision taken by the Israeli Government is untimely and fraught with consequences. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People hopes that following this debate, the General Assembly will show overwhelmingly its firm resolve to see to it that Israel rescinds its decision to build housing units for Jewish settlers in the area of Jabal Abu Ghneim and puts an end to its policy of Judaizing the Holy City of Jerusalem, a city that symbolizes the peaceful coexistence of believers from the three monotheistic religions — this city which must remain, as its name indicates, a city of peace.

As I stated in the Security Council, it is high time that all the peoples in the region, who have made irreplaceable contributions to our civilization, learn to live together in mutual respect and forge a peace that would benefit the region as a whole.

In conclusion, like previous speakers, I should like to pay tribute to the memory of His Excellency the late Mr. Deng Xiaoping, Paramount Leader of the People's Republic of China, who passed away recently. Possessed of outstanding statesmanlike qualities, foresight and wisdom, he has left, through his efforts to ensure the prosperity of the Chinese people, an indelible mark on history at the end of this century.

Two other great leaders have passed away recently: President Cheddi Jagan of Guyana and the former Prime Minister of Jamaica, Mr. Michael Manley, both of whom also were illustrious statesmen. We would like to express our sympathy and to pay a well-deserved tribute to them.

Finally, we would like to convey our condolences to the Government of Pakistan and the Government of Iran on the loss of human life they have suffered in the wake of the natural disasters that struck their countries.

Mr. Al-Khalifa (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I should like at the outset, on behalf of my delegation and on that of the other members of the League of Arab States — Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen — to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this special meeting of the General Assembly to discuss the situation in the Arab occupied territories, and in particular Israel's decision to build settlements in Jabal Abu Ghneim, in East Jerusalem.

I should like also to thank the members of the Non-Aligned Movement, who facilitated the convening of this meeting. My gratitude goes also to the Security Council members that are also members of the European Union — Portugal, Sweden, France and Great Britain — for their work and their co-sponsorship of the European draft resolution submitted to the Security Council, which received 14 votes in favour but was not adopted because of the veto of one of the permanent members.

Once again, the United States of America has vetoed a draft resolution relating to Jerusalem — a draft resolution that received 14 votes in favour. It last did this on 17 May 1994, when Israel confiscated Arab-owned land in Jerusalem. This is a deplorable situation, since the United States has played a key role in the Middle East process since the Madrid Conference. Such conduct, in the eyes of the Arab Group, abets the current Israeli Government in its attempts to continue carrying out its settlement policies in occupied Arab territories in order to annex them.

The peace process, founded on the principle of land for peace, is thus endangered. Israel's current conduct flies in the face of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 252 (1968), 271 (1969), 298 (1971), 478 (1980) and 672 (1990). These resolutions state that any administrative or legislative measures taken by Israel to change the legal status or demographic composition of Jerusalem are null and void and devoid of legal value. The international community has also categorically rejected Israeli assertions regarding Jerusalem and has reiterated that Israeli authority is not recognized on the territory of East Jerusalem.

We call upon the international community to prevent Israel from continuing to flout these resolutions and thereby contravene international law. This peace process exists because of the Madrid Conference and the efforts of the parties involved, and particularly those of the United States, which played a privileged role in convening the Madrid Conference and in the Washington Declaration of 1993, as well as during subsequent stages.

We would not have had to call for this meeting of the General Assembly had the Security Council discharged its role as the United Nations body primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mr. Wilmot (Ghana), Vice-President, took the Chair.

This is why we are addressing the General Assembly today. It is the body that reflects international opinion and the views of all the Members of the United Nations, and no Member here has any privileges such as the veto.

The Security Council nevertheless bears special responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations. Peace is not the responsibility of Arabs and Palestinians alone. It is a responsibility shared among all parties and the international community. The fact that Israel is flouting international authority not only threatens Arab-Israeli peace, but also the credibility of international opinion as reflected in the United Nations.

The Palestinian party calls for negotiations on the settlements and Jerusalem as part and parcel of the final negotiations. We do not agree with the Israeli position of thwarting these negotiations before they begin. The Interim Agreement signed in Washington in 1995 states that no party must take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and Gaza before the negotiations have been concluded. That includes the status of Jerusalem and the issues of refugees, settlements, borders and security measures.

The Israeli Government's decision flies in the face of that agreement and flouts the Geneva Convention of 1949, as well as several General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The statements made in the Security Council and the votes of 14 States in favour of the European Union-sponsored draft resolution are a condemnation of Israeli policy, including settlement policy, despite the stubbornness of one permanent member that has veto power.

The Arab Group calls upon its friends and the friends of peace in the General Assembly, members of our great family representing mankind as a whole, to send a clear and categorical message rejecting Israel's practices and policies that jeopardize the peace process in the Middle East and take the region back to a period of confrontation and wasteful armament rather than constructive development for the good of mankind.

Mr. Wisnumurti (Indonesia): The international community is faced with yet another attempt by the Government of Israel to renege on its legal commitments under the Oslo accords and the subsequent agreements and to undermine the peace process in the Middle East. The Indonesian delegation condemns the illegal Israeli decision of 26 February 1997 to build a new settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim in Jerusalem. The failure of the Security Council on 7 March 1997 to discharge its mandate under the Charter is a source of profound disappointment and regret to my delegation. This failure signals not merely the obstruction of the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the members of the Council, but above all the stifling of the voices of those outside the Council, within the Middle East region and beyond, who have called on Israel to rescind its decision. It is now therefore essential that the General Assembly address this urgent matter.

My delegation deems it most appropriate and timely at this critical juncture in the peace process that the General Assembly articulate unambiguously the feelings and views of the international community, for the question before us is indisputably clear. The Israeli decision constitutes a flagrant violation of resolutions of this body and of the Security Council, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 252 (1968) and 338 (1973), which, *inter alia*, emphasize the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and consider invalid all measures and actions taken by Israel which seek to

change the legal status of Jerusalem. It is a decision which is in breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of other rules of international law. It is totally contrary to the letter and spirit of the Declaration of Principles and the subsequent agreements, not least because it seeks to pre-empt the outcome of the permanent status negotiations by changing the legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem.

By contrast, the Palestinians have demonstrated great restraint and patience and have opted for peaceful means to resolve the current crisis. Their appeal for concrete action by the Security Council has unfortunately been frustrated by a negative vote of one of the permanent members of the Council. Therefore it is now imperative that the voice of reason and justice of the international community be heard through the deliberations of this meeting of the General Assembly and that effective measures be adopted to address the illegal action of Israel.

The urgency of the matter is beyond doubt, for what is at stake is the very credibility of the agreements already reached and, indeed, the wider peace process. It is my delegation's conviction that the international community must help save the peace process from the irresponsible policies and practices of Israel which systematically undermine the wish of the international community to find a peaceful solution in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. The provocative Israeli actions will only lead to further bloodshed, with all the attendant dangerous consequences which will jeopardize peace and security in the Middle East.

Actions that could jeopardize the peace process must be condemned and the endeavours for peace be made irreversible. The gains attained thus far in the peace process are indeed of historic significance. It is now up to Israel to implement scrupulously the provisions of the various agreements reached with the Palestinians.

The consequence of inaction by the international community in the face of Israel's blatant disregard of the agreements already reached should be obvious. There will be more breaches of resolutions of the Council, the General Assembly and international law. The latest Israeli decision follows decisions to build a new settlement in Ras al-Amud and the opening of the tunnel located within Haram al-Sharif, and therefore constitutes part of a concerted effort to isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. There is thus a clear pattern of provocative Israeli acts which derive encouragement from any signs of inaction on the part of the international community. Their recent intensification, while deeply troubling, is thus, at the same time, not altogether surprising. The present Israeli Government is reneging with apparent impunity on its obligations under the Oslo accords. The latest crisis caused by the Israeli decision to hand over only nine per cent of the West Bank instead of 30 per cent, as had been agreed upon and expected by Palestinian leaders, simply confirmed this unfortunate reality.

Much more is at stake than written agreements. The mutual trust and confidence that have been painstakingly built over the past four years risk being dissipated. The very integrity of the peace process is being unilaterally challenged and there can be no doubt where the onus of responsibility lies. The Government of Israel cannot shirk its responsibility for the consequences emanating from its ill-conceived policies and practices.

The settlement of the question of Palestine — that is, the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people — is a prerequisite for achieving a durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It has been our hope ever since the Madrid peace process was initiated in 1991 that progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track of negotiations would have a positive spillover effect on the other tracks of negotiations. In reality, progress on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks has remained stubbornly slow due to the lack of concrete evidence of Israeli commitment to the peace process.

Clearly, therefore, the prospect of a return to the old legacy of enmity and mistrust on the Israeli-Palestinian track of negotiations caused by the policies of the present Israeli Government bodes ill for the entire Middle East peace process. For peace, justice and stability to prevail in the Middle East, the United Nations must ensure the unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and Lebanon, through the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

I should, finally, like to take this occasion to refer to the communiqué adopted by the Islamic Group of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in New York at its meeting on 3 March 1997. There, the Islamic Group, *inter alia*, called on the Security Council to take urgent steps to ensure that the Government of Israel reverse its decision and renounce any settlement activity in all Arab occupied territories, in particular East Jerusalem. As Chairman of the Islamic Group and as a

representative of a country that has long stood firm on the principles of respect for the rights of the Palestinians and their claim to sovereignty over their land, I should like today to direct that call to the General Assembly of the United Nations so that it may do what the Security Council has failed to do: compel the Government of Israel to reverse its decision and to desist from policies and actions which are contrary to the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and agreements already reached and incompatible with the ongoing peace process.

Mr. Konishi (Japan): Japan believes that efforts to improve the present situation in the Middle East should be carried out on a double track. The immediate task is for the parties directly involved to engage in efforts to bridge the chasm of mistrust that separates them by refraining from any action that could harm the prospects of the peace process. On a more fundamental level and at the same time, it is imperative that the parties intensify their efforts, in good faith and with steadfast determination, to advance the peace process.

From this point of view, Japan considers regrettable the decision made by the Government of Israel on the construction of housing at Har Homa — or, in Arabic, Jabal Abu Ghneim — in East Jerusalem. It is particularly unfortunate that this decision was made in the wake of the agreement that had been reached between Israel and the Palestine Authority on Hebron. In Japan's view, that agreement symbolized a step forward towards advancing the Middle East peace process.

Japan believes that the decision of the Government of Israel runs the risk of jeopardizing the basic situation concerning the occupied territory and of prejudging the outcome of the final status negotiations. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the fact that the Government of Israel took its decision at precisely the time when the Middle East peace process, and particularly its Palestinian track, is at a crucial stage.

On 27 February, when Foreign Minister Levy of Israel visited Japan, Prime Minister Hashimoto emphasized that Japan regretted the decision of the Government of Israel, since it constituted a negative factor for the peace process.

The Government of Japan has since been urging the parties involved to make every effort not to allow the present situation to develop into a major obstacle to the peace process and to do their utmost to push that process further forward. In Japan's view, it is not too late for the Government of Israel to reconsider its decision.

It is out of the same concern for restoring peace in the region that Japan has been actively involving itself in the peace process in the Middle East, in particular through active participation in the multilateral talks that began with the Madrid Conference in October 1991. My country, as a member of the Steering Group and as gavel-holder of the Working Group on Environment, has been instrumental in providing a favourable environment that will assist the direct talks among the parties concerned. Also as part of those efforts, Japan has been implementing various projects, worth approximately $250 million, to promote Palestinian self-rule in its initial phase after the Oslo accord. With a view to creating a new spirit of mutual confidence and joint cooperation among the countries of the region, Japan has been calling on the countries concerned to convene a plenary meeting of the environmental Working Group, as well as a meeting of the Steering Group for the multilateral talks, at the earliest possible time so that the Palestinian track may proceed smoothly following the Hebron agreement.

There is a very real danger that the Israeli decision could lead to a crisis of confidence. If that should happen, the resulting mistrust and rancour among the parties could destroy the very structure for peace in the Middle East. It is my earnest hope that all the parties concerned will exert their best efforts to overcome the present situation and, in so doing, offer the people of the region solid grounds for hope towards a more peaceful and secure future.

Mr. De Silva (Sri Lanka): The delegation of Sri Lanka wishes to express its grave concern at the decision of the Government of Israel to commence the construction of nearly 6,500 housing units in the Jabal Abu Ghneim area of East Jerusalem. This is a step taken in furtherance and as part of its illegal policy of expanding settlements in the West Bank of Palestine, designed to alter the demographic character of this integral part of Palestine, and an attempt to frustrate the establishment of a sovereign State in Palestine.

As Palestine is a land under alien occupation, such acts on the part of Israel, as the occupying Power, are unlawful and in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The confiscation of land and property of the Palestinian people is, likewise, not merely a violation of their inalienable rights but also an attempt to pre-empt the outcome of the impending talks on the final status of Jerusalem. Such acts need to be deplored because they are calculated to negate the hard-won gains

of the peace process that has inched its way forward amid overwhelming odds.

If there is to be evidence of a genuine wish for peace on the part of Israel, and negotiations are not to be a mere cloak for deception, there has to be radical change of heart. Israel must adopt a more humane attitude towards the Palestinian people, who have endured great hardship and tribulation for nearly half a century, in particular since the 1967 war, which resulted in the subjugation of Palestine by Israel.

It is the very nearly universal view of Member States of the United Nations that the Government of Israel must desist from following these regressive policies of settlement expansion on the West Bank and other practices which deprive Palestinians of their rights because they are so inimical to peace in the Middle East. Israel must refrain from acts likely to ignite conflict which could set the whole region ablaze.

We call upon Israel to comply with its international obligations and responsibilities as an occupying Power under the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which indisputably apply to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. We also appeal to all parties to this conflict to adhere to their commitments to peace and to pursue negotiations for a just settlement of this question.

Finally, in our view the international community has an onerous duty and obligation to enforce Israel's compliance with its obligations under the peace agreements, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the applicable principles of international law. This task must be undertaken without evasion and equivocation. It necessitates the immediate cessation of the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements and the dismantling of those that exist illegally within the occupied Palestinian territory and other Arab lands.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): This urgent meeting of the Assembly has been convened at the request of the Arab Group and the Non-Aligned Movement to consider the current, potentially dangerous situation in the Middle East, which has arisen from the decision of the Israeli Government to build a new Jewish settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. My delegation believes that by convening this meeting, the General Assembly is carrying out its responsibility, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter, in the wake of the Security Council's failure to pronounce itself on this important issue.

My delegation, along with 47 other delegations, participated in the formal meeting of the Security Council on this issue last week. My delegation had expected that, given the sentiments expressed by an overwhelming majority of the delegations that spoke, the Council would have endorsed the draft resolution which had been tabled. That draft resolution, which was couched in most reasonable and moderate language, had, *inter alia*, expressed deep concern at the decision of the Israeli Government to initiate new settlement activities in East Jerusalem. It called upon the Israeli authorities to refrain from all actions or measures, including settlement activities, which would alter the facts on the ground and thereby pre-empt the final status negotiations and undermine the fragile peace process. To our great disappointment, that draft resolution was vetoed by a permanent member of the Council, thereby frustrating the will of the international community, as expressed by the overwhelming majority of Council members, which wanted the Council to pronounce itself on this important issue. My delegation does not accept the contention that the Security Council and the General Assembly are not the appropriate forums to discuss the Middle East issue. This contention is intended to sideline the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, and to allow the power imperatives of certain States to hold sway on the issue.

It has been claimed that the multitude of United Nations resolutions relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict have failed to advance the peace process even one inch. We need not ask ourselves why this is so. The answer is patently clear to all who have followed the issue closely.

It is therefore up to this Assembly to address this issue of utmost importance to peace and security in the Middle East. My delegation believes that this Assembly can and will pronounce itself on this issue in unambiguous terms.

Since the beginning of the Madrid peace process in October 1991, my delegation has noted and welcomed the positive developments that have taken place. The signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993 and the subsequent agreements, in particular the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of 1995, have led to the phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from six major towns in the West Bank and to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the deployment of a Palestinian police force in the areas concerned.

Last year we witnessed further encouraging developments which constituted important political steps towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem. The election of representatives to the Palestinian Legislative Council and of a Palestinian National Authority President in January 1996 was followed by the negotiations on the permanent status of the Palestinian territory on 5 May 1996, although it was adjourned after a number of procedural decisions had been agreed upon. All these positive developments have been followed and welcomed by the international community.

We are further encouraged by the signing of the Hebron protocol on 17 January this year, which led to the redeployment of Israeli troops from most parts of Hebron, to be followed by a three-phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank beginning in the first week of March 1997. This development has been widely regarded as a positive step towards the full realization of the long-awaited comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Both parties were expected to honour their commitments in good faith and refrain from taking any measures which could undermine the peace process.

Unfortunately, instead of honouring its commitments, the Israeli Government has, in an act of bad faith, taken a unilateral decision to approve the construction of a new Jewish settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim, in defiance of Palestinian sentiments. Clearly, this was a deliberate and provocative act, intended to break the spirit of the Palestinian people and to deny them their cherished dream of a State of their own, with Jerusalem as its capital. It is not intended to inspire and encourage, but to humiliate and intimidate. It is not an act of statesmanship, but one of brinkmanship. It is a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a blatant contravention of the relevant United Nations resolutions. It could have serious negative repercussions on the peace process. Instead of building confidence and understanding, the Israeli Government has chosen to build new settlements in violation of established principles of international law and its own treaty commitments. Such a decision only breeds suspicion and mistrust.

We have just heard from the Permanent Observer of Palestine a litany of Israeli violations of international conventions and of the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council. One can therefore question the real commitment of Israel to peace. The latest decision of the Israeli Government to withdraw from only 9 per cent of the occupied territories in the West Bank is yet another manifestation of bad faith which could further undermine the already delicate situation.

As it did during the Council debate, my delegation reiterates its strong condemnation of this Israeli measure and calls on the Israeli Government to rescind its decision and to desist from taking any further unilateral actions which could undermine the still fragile peace process. My delegation regrets the failure of the Security Council to adopt the draft resolution, which had the support of 14 of its 15 members. With the failure of the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility, my delegation would therefore urge the Assembly to pronounce itself on this important issue. My delegation believes that the adoption an appropriately worded draft resolution by this Assembly is necessary to convey the international community's strong disapproval of the decision of the Israeli Government. That is the least that the Assembly can do in support of the Palestinian Authority and of the people of Palestine, who have exercised the utmost restraint in the face of this latest provocation.

Jerusalem is a city of great spiritual importance not only to the Jews but also to the entire Muslim and Christian communities. The issue of Jerusalem should be settled through negotiations, not through unilateral preemptive measures. My delegation, therefore, cannot accept any policies adopted or illegal measures taken by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem aimed at judaizing the city and changing its legal status and demographic character to advance its own political and strategic interests. My delegation believes that in the interest of securing a durable peace between Palestine and Israel no attempts should be made by the parties concerned which could prejudge the outcome of the final status negotiations.

Malaysia has consistently voiced its support for a comprehensive and just solution to the Middle East conflict, one that would bring durable peace and stability to all countries in the region consistent with the various resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. My delegation reaffirms Malaysia's total commitment to and unwavering support for the Palestinian people in their struggle to attain a just and lasting peace and an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Çelem (Turkey): One week ago, the situation in the occupied Arab territories, and particularly the building of new Israeli settlements, was debated in the Security Council. At that time, we expressed our views on this

critical issue. I would like to reiterate that the Turkish Government is most seriously concerned about the latest decision of the Israeli Government to approve a housing project in the Jabal Abu Ghneim area of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in defiance of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. We believe that the deliberations in the Council reflected the unanimous opposition of the international community to this unilateral Israeli initiative.

Israelis and Palestinians are partners in peace. This understanding and the progress achieved so far on the path to enduring peace and stability in the region have not come easily. They have required wisdom and farsightedness on the part of leaders, as well as sacrifice, perseverance and tremendous effort. So much has been achieved in peacemaking between the Arabs and the Israelis, leading very recently to the protocol on Al-Khalil and to the further redeployment of Israeli forces. These new developments finally cleared the way for the final status talks, which will also include negotiations on the future of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. We have approached the point at which the final peaceful resolution of this long-standing dispute is clearly in sight. However, it is disconcerting and very discouraging to encounter, as we have done so many times over the past eight months, unilateral actions endangering the peace process, which have the potential to cause serious disruptions and which could even deal the peace process a blow from which it might never recover.

Everyone is aware that the Israeli Government unfortunately views the Jabal Abu Ghneim project as a method for preempting the outcome of the negotiations on final status, particularly on the future of the Holy City, which is equally holy for all three major monotheistic religions. At a time when the commitment demonstrated by the Israeli Government to the established parameters of the peace process was rekindling our hopes for the future of the Middle East, the decision to allow construction in Jabal Abu Ghneim has once again caused deep worries with regard to the success of the process. Any decision which could affect the outcome of the final status talks should not even be considered until the successful conclusion of the negotiations.

The tragic events of last September following another unilateral decision by the Israeli Government regarding a holy site — again in Al-Quds — are vivid in our minds. The chain reaction provoked by that decision to open an archaeological tunnel passing under the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex should have been an important lesson for all the parties involved on what not to do at this critical point in time when, significantly, not only the future of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, but also the future of the entire Middle East peace process hangs in the balance.

In this vein I wish to confirm Turkey's unwavering support for and belief in the Middle East peace process, which we deem to be the only rational path to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. To achieve this goal, we urge the parties to adhere to Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as to the Declaration of Principles and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and thereby to contribute positively to the peace process.

Finally, I would like to repeat my Government's call on the Government of Israel to reconsider and reverse its policy of resuming settlement activities in Jabal Abu Ghneim and other occupied areas.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): The Bangladesh delegation believes that the convening of this urgent meeting of the General Assembly to discuss the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine is very timely and appropriate.

In recent weeks we have witnessed some ominous turns of events in the Middle East following a number of unilateral decisions taken by the Israeli Government. The Israeli decision to build new Jewish settlements in Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem has caused serious concern about prospects for the peace process. The latest blow emerged from the decision to partially withdraw Israeli troops from the West Bank in a manner chosen by Israel. No prior consultations were held with the Palestinian Authority on these moves; there was no consideration of obligations under the peace accords; nor was any respect for the process of a partnership towards peace shown by Israel. One is thus led to believe that the purpose of these decisions, taken on the eve of the commencement of the final status negotiations, was defined by a desire to significantly change the legal, physical and demographic character of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

It is believed that Israel also intends to isolate the Palestinian population of Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank so that they can never expect to fulfil their aspiration of making this city the capital of their independent state. It is indeed unfortunate to note that the Israeli Government is attempting to paralyse and eventually destroy the peace process, with a view to consigning the Palestinian people to perpetual subjugation and occupation. By any standard, these actions not only

violate the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the provisions of The Hague Convention of 1907 applicable to the occupied territories, as well as the letter and spirit of the peace accords, to which Israel is a party, but also constitutes an affront to the international community.

During the debate in the Security Council on this issue last week, 49 delegations spoke out, and almost all of them, including Bangladesh, expressed concern while deploring the Israeli decision to construct settlements in Jabal Abu Ghneim, in East Jerusalem. They also called upon the Council to compel the Israeli Government to revoke its decision to construct these illegal settlements. The Israeli decision was seen as an expression of extreme arrogance and an act designed to create an obstacle on the road to peace.

Unfortunately, despite an overwhelming rejection of the Israeli action, the Security Council could not come up with a resolution urging Israel to rescind its decision in the greater interest of preserving a positive spirit of partnership for the peace process. We were told that adopting a resolution in the Security Council would not help the ongoing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

We fail to understand how this could have happened. We are reminded time and again that the entire Middle East peace process, which began in Madrid in 1991 and was formalized through subsequent agreements between the Palestinians and the Israeli Government, was based essentially on the relevant resolutions adopted by the Security Council. One wonders how at this point in time this same Security Council could have lost its validity in terms of encouraging parties to work constructively to preserve the momentum of the peace process. We consider this to be a serious failure by the Council to respond effectively and in a timely manner in addressing an issue so crucial to peace and security in such a volatile region of the world. Nothing could be more unfortunate than to see Israel seize the opportunity presented by the Council's lack of initiative to intensify its unilateral actions on other crucial issues, showing utter disregard for the aspirations and rights of the Palestinian people.

The position of Bangladesh on the Middle East peace process is well known. We believe that no concept of partnership in peace can be promoted by unilateral actions. By the same token, Israel must understand that any meaningful progress on the road to peace on the Palestine-Israel track, which is the core of the Middle East peace process, must involve full, effective and meaningful participation by the Palestinians at all levels and at each step. We believe also that no peace will last in the Middle East without Jerusalem being the capital of the state of Palestine. We will therefore continue to support the just struggle of the Palestinian people to establish their homeland in Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital. Bangladesh is also of the view that complete withdrawal of all Israeli troops from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories is an essential precondition for restoring a climate of trust and peace among the States in that region.

The international community bears a solemn responsibility to see that the Middle East peace process is not jeopardized by the provocative and irresponsible actions undertaken by one State in that region. Bangladesh therefore calls upon the General Assembly forcefully to pronounce itself against the unilateral decisions of Israel that could potentially damage the peace process. It also calls upon Israel to refrain from undertaking any activity detrimental to the promotion of mutual trust and understanding, which are so vital to the success of the ongoing peace process. Bangladesh also joins other delegations in sponsoring and strongly supporting the draft resolution presented on this question.

Mr. Londoño Paredes (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): This is the second time in the space of a year that it has been necessary to call for the convening of the General Assembly because of the refusal by one permanent member to enable the Security Council to discharge its responsibility to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security. Once again this veto is in reference to a situation that jeopardizes peace in the Middle East.

As stated by the overwhelming majority of the international community, and as demonstrated at the Security Council meetings held last Thursday and Friday, the decision by the Government of Israel to pursue its settlements policy in the occupied Arab territories, and specifically in Jerusalem, is a serious distortion of the spirit of the Oslo accords. It erodes the fragile climate of trust that had been achieved among the parties with the signing of the Hebron Protocol and affects the outcome of the permanent status negotiations that are to be held between Israel and the Palestine Authority. Furthermore — and this is what is most surprising about this veto of the draft resolution — Israel's decision flouts more than 24 previous Security Council resolutions on the situation in the occupied Arab territories.

Accordingly, it is a matter of concern that despite the widespread outcry of the international community, the will of one single State has prevented the Security Council from meeting its obligations. It is even more worrisome if we consider that one of the sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East is involved. This conduct, together with that State's increasing tendency to arrogate to itself the role — never assigned to it — of both judge and jury of all matters and all States, is sowing mistrust and resentment among the countries that have been its allies and friends.

At a time when emphasis is supposed to be placed on the preventive role of the United Nations, it is illogical to stand idly by and watch security deteriorate in a region where, after many years, the road to peace had finally been found.

It is up to the General Assembly to reiterate today to the Palestinian people the unfailing commitment of the United Nations to the search for peace and the international community's continuing support for the cause of peace in the Middle East.

I believe that it is necessary to recall today what was said on the subject of Jerusalem by the Heads of State or Government of the 113 countries members of the Non-Aligned Movement at the Cartagena Summit in 1995. They expressed, among other things, their unqualified support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to guarantee respect for its inalienable right to self-determination and independence and reiterated the demand that Israel withdraw from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem.

The Heads of State or Government also ratified all Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on Jerusalem and called for the full and scrupulous implementation of the agreements, and in particular of the provisions contained in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), and underscored the need for the mechanism dealing with the question of Palestine established by the General Assembly to continue to function effectively.

At that meeting they also called on Israel to refrain from establishing any settlements in the Holy City of Jerusalem and from undertaking any other geographic of demographic changes there. Israel was also called upon to comply with the agreements and commitments relating to the preservation of Palestinian institutions and Islamic and Christian holy places in the city of Jerusalem, in keeping with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

My delegation wishes to express its thanks to the parties for their tremendous efforts in the Middle East peace process. We also wish to express our respect for their positions on the various issues. We agree that direct talks are the best way to secure independence and self-determination for the Palestinian people and to secure peace for all in the region. This is precisely why we think that the position adopted by one of the parties at this juncture should not prevail over the essential interest of maintaining trust so that the negotiation process can continue to bear fruit.

Mr. Kharrazi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my gratitude for the convening of this resumed session of the General Assembly, where the international community has a chance not to be censored and where it can at least voice its opinion in the form of a resolution on the latest act of lawlessness by Israel without being silenced or rendered ineffective by a single member.

Last week the Security Council failed to adopt a mild draft resolution calling on Israel to refrain from settlement activities in East Jerusalem. The Council failed to adopt that less than ideal draft resolution not because any of the Council members expressed support for the Israeli decision to build new settlements in East Jerusalem, nor because they and other members of the Organization did not disapprove of, condemn, express dissatisfaction with or criticize the Israeli decision. In fact, 49 speakers addressed the Security Council on the issue. All disapproved of the Israeli decision, and many characterized it as only one instance of an overall Israeli plan to create a *fait accompli* and ensure the Judaization of Jerusalem.

The Council failed to adopt the draft resolution because a permanent member placed itself above and beyond the wishes of the international community as reflected by 48 of the statements made in the Council and the 14 votes cast in favour of the draft resolution. The statements in the General Assembly are another index of the views of the general membership of the Organization and of the isolation of the decision to veto the draft resolution in the Council.

The historical rights and sentiments of the Palestinian people and the sacredness which Jerusalem embodies for more than a billion Muslims throughout the world aside, the Israeli decision to build new settlements in East Jerusalem has raised international outrage among traditional supporters of Israel to such an extent that even

the permanent member that, in practice, vetoed the resolution could not but concede, if only verbally.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the least surprised by the double talk. However, we found the new twist in this exercise of veto quite disturbing for the relevance and credibility of the Organization as a whole. More disturbing than the veto itself is the premise upon which it was supposedly based: that the United Nations is not an appropriate forum to address the issue at hand. To quote the official position of the United States,

> "We've had a consistent position that we can never achieve peace through United Nations Security Council resolutions." (*The New York Times, "Mideast Veto Was Justified, Clinton says", 11 March 1997, sect. A, p. 6*)

I have news for them. The United Nations is relevant because it was founded for the very purpose of maintaining international peace and security, for preventing and removing threats to peace and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of peace. The general membership of the Organization has delegated the task of the maintenance and restoration of international peace and security to the Security Council of the United Nations in a fiduciary sense.

The blatant disregard for Islamic history and the Palestinian heritage in Jerusalem — which in and of itself could have dangerous repercussions on the ground — and the total disregard for the international outrage over the Israeli decision to build new settlements in East Jerusalem, which are manifested in the veto of the draft resolution last Friday, are clearly a misuse of that fiduciary trust in the Security Council, at least as far as the permanent member that vetoed the resolution is concerned.

We believe that it is in this context that the General Assembly is addressing the question of Israeli intransigence. My delegation is confident that the General Assembly will — of course, within the structural constraints of the Organization — reflect the gravity of the issue for international peace and security and convey to the Security Council the message that it must, as a matter of principle, muster the necessary courage to shoulder its Charter responsibility.

Land-grabbing and the building of new housing projects through the use of brute force, intimidation, deceit and mere trickery in order to change the basic characteristics of the Palestinian territories have always been integral components of the Zionists' grand design to plant themselves in Palestine and perpetuate their occupation. However, the recent decision to build new Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, particularly at this juncture, has taken that unholy policy a few steps forward. It has presented those who have put their faith and hope in Israeli peace overtures with yet another example of the inherent untrustworthiness of Zionist conduct.

The religious value and critical importance which the Palestinian people and Muslims as a whole attach to the holy city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif are no secret to anybody here or to the world at large. Let us confirm this reality and send a clear message — not that the debate and votes in the Security Council last Friday were not clear enough — that the recent decision to build new Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem must be rescinded.

Mr. Wang Xuexian (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): The General Assembly's convening today of an urgent meeting following the formal meeting of the Security Council last week has fully demonstrated the earnest and strong concern of the international community over the recent decision of the Israeli Government to build Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem.

The Chinese delegation expresses its grave concern over this move by the Israeli Government. We are of the view that it is bound to set serious obstacles in the way of the Palestine-Israel peace process and to harm the Middle East peace process as a whole. We urge Israel to call off its plan to build Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem.

The Palestinian question is at the core of the Middle East question. An early, fair, reasonable and lasting solution to this question and the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people are the keys to peace, stability and development in the Middle East. The question of Jerusalem should be settled by the parties concerned through negotiations on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions. Given that final status negotiations are imminent, the parties concerned should avoid any unilateral move contrary to this approach, since it would only further complicate the question instead of contributing to its proper settlement or to the Middle East peace process.

The Chinese Government has always supported the Middle East peace process and stood for a political settlement of the Middle East question on the basis of

therelevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. The results so far achieved in the peace process in the Middle East have not been come by easily and should therefore be cherished by the parties concerned. We hope that the parties concerned will avoid making any move that might aggravate the conflict and undermine the Middle East peace process, and that they will instead encourage all positive efforts to ease tensions, thereby creating a favourable atmosphere for the further advancement of the Middle East peace process.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.